

Catholic Rural Life Receives 5-Year Grant to Support Pastors in Rural Communities

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Catholic Rural Life has received a \$ 1 million grant to help establish its *Thriving in Rural Ministry* program. This grant is part of Lilly Endowment Inc.'s Thriving in Ministry, an initiative that supports religious organizations across the nation as they create programs that help pastors build relationships with experienced clergy mentors and guide them through key leadership challenges in congregational ministry.

Lilly Endowment is giving nearly \$70 million in grants through the Thriving in Ministry initiative.

Catholic Rural Life (CRL) seeks to create a program that will serve pastors of rural communities by offering retreats for them to come together and learn from one another, to deepen relationships and to build fraternal communities that go beyond the retreats. CRL will use the five-year grant to create a network of pastors serving rural communities who can encourage, sharpen and help one another.

For more than 95 years CRL has been serving rural communities throughout the country through various programs. Currently, many pastors serving in rural communities are responsible for multiple parishes that are separated by long distances. This is a dynamic that is challenging for these priests.

“Many pastors have told us of their feelings of isolation and need for fellowship with peers and wise mentors. CRL’s new program will help pastors overcome some of the unique challenges in pastoral ministry they face, while also creating ongoing fraternity and fellowship,” says James Ennis, Executive Director of CRL. “We work with many priests who are doing outstanding work in rural ministry, and we want to be able to share those models of best practice with other pastors around the country.”

Catholic Rural Life is one of the 78 organizations from 29 states that are taking part in the initiative. All the organizations reflect diverse Christian traditions: mainline and evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic and Orthodox.

Thriving in Ministry is part of Lilly Endowment’s grantmaking to strengthen pastoral leadership in Christian congregations in the United States. This has been a grantmaking priority at Lilly Endowment for nearly 25 years.

“Leading a congregation today is multi-faceted and exceptionally demanding,” said Christopher L. Coble, Lilly Endowment’s vice president for religion. “When pastors have opportunities to build meaningful relationships with experienced colleagues, they are able to negotiate the challenges of ministry and their leadership thrives. These promising programs, including Catholic Rural Life’s *Thriving in Rural Ministry* program, will help pastors develop these kinds of relationships, especially when they are in the midst of significant professional transitions.”

Lilly Endowment Inc. is an Indianapolis-based private philanthropic foundation created in 1937 by three members of the Lilly family - J.K. Lilly Sr. and sons Eli and J.K. Jr. - through gifts of stock in their pharmaceutical business, Eli Lilly & Company. While those gifts remain the financial bedrock of the Endowment, the Endowment is a separate entity from the company, with a distinct governing board, staff and location. In keeping with the founders’ wishes, the Endowment supports the causes of community development, education and religion. The Endowment maintains a special commitment to its hometown, Indianapolis, and its home state Indiana. Its grantmaking in religion focuses on supporting efforts to strengthen the leadership and vitality of Christian congregations throughout the country and to increase the public’s understanding of the role of religion in public life.